

Iowa Outdoors

Iowa Department of Natural Resources
www.iowadnr.gov

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Although Statewide Bird Numbers are Down, Iowans Will Still Enjoy Some of the Nation's Best Hunting

IOWA PHEASANT SEASON BEGINS OCT. 25

By Lowell Washburn

Iowa Department of Natural Resources

DES MOINES---For Iowa pheasant hunting enthusiasts, the most exciting day of the year is almost here. The 2008 Iowa Pheasant Season begins Saturday, October 25. Opening day for this year's special two-day youth pheasant hunt is Saturday, October 18.

From all perspectives, the annual pheasant opener is Iowa's Outdoor Sporting Event of the Year. With an estimated 100,000 ring-neck enthusiasts taking to the fields, nothing else compares to the rich tradition and camaraderie with this annual event.

There's good reason for all the excitement. Few thrills can compare to the explosive, heart pounding flush of a cackling rooster. And what outdoor happening can equal the sight of a good bird dog suddenly slamming on point?

As is the case with all species of upland game birds, pheasant populations are subject to extreme cycles of boom and bust. The boom cycles are what hunters live for. By contrast, the fall is ruined when numbers crash. This year, Iowa hunters will find pheasant populations somewhere in between those extremes. Statewide bird numbers have declined by about a third from last season. An extremely long snowy winter followed by spring flooding resulted in overall poor production. The only exception occurred in northwestern Iowa where birds were largely exempt from spring flooding. In that region, pheasant numbers actually increased over last season ---- easily making

Northwest Iowa the brightest spot in this year's pheasant hunting forecast.

"Although wildlife habitat is always a critical issue, this year's pheasant hunting outlook is totally weather related," says DNR Pheasant Biologist, Todd Bogenschutz. "Pheasants suffered a double whammie from the weather this year, and numbers are down. Pheasant populations are extremely dynamic. Given the circumstances [of weather], this is what we know will happen. If weather cooperates in the future, birds will spring back. That's just how it's going to work.

"I think hunters need to keep in mind that Iowa will still offer some of the nation's best pheasant hunting," adds Bogenschutz. "This year, Iowa hunters will still have the possibility of bagging a limit of roosters in every single county of the state. The big difference is that this season hunters will have to put in more leg work or may rely more heavily on their dog's nose. In most places, hunters won't be seeing flocks of 50 or 100 birds getting into the air. But hunters who put in their time will still see roosters."

Regardless of how many roosters are actually lurking in your personal pheasant hunting hot spot, opening weekend success will be aided or hindered by two all important, make or break factors --- weather conditions and corn harvest.

For upland bird hunters, rain and excessive winds spell disaster. By contrast, fair skies and a light breeze all but guarantee roast pheasant for Sunday dinner. As far as the opening day weather goes, we'll just have to wait and see. After all, this is Iowa.

The status of this year's crop harvest is easier to predict. Most of the state is currently running at least two weeks behind average on corn harvest. My guess is that, when the October 25 opener finally arrives, at least half of this year's corn crop will still be standing in the field. If that happens, it will have at least some negative impact on opening weekend success.

The brighter side of the coin is that standing corn will provide tens of thousands of acres of temporary pheasant refuge. As the crop harvest continues, those diminishing fields will insure a steady and dependable supply of naive, yet-to-be-hunted roosters in the weeks ahead. For resident hunters who tromp the uplands until the bitter end, a somewhat slower start in October could lead to increased opportunities when the winter snow flies.

Regardless of how things actually shake out for this year's opening day, Iowa hunters can still expect plenty of excitement during the 2008 season.

Pheasant Hunting Safety Tips

- Wear plenty of blaze orange colored clothing. To hunt upland game birds, hunters must wear at least one of the following articles of visible, external apparel with at least 50 percent of its surface area solid blaze orange in color: hat, cap, vest, coat, jacket, sweatshirt, shirt or coveralls. The more blaze orange a hunter wears the less chance they have of being injured.

- Develop a hunting plan outlining how the hunt will take place and each person's role in the hunt, and stick to the plan.
- Know the zone of fire in front of each hunter and stay within the zone.
- Check with the landowner to see if any other hunters will be on the property.
- Identify the target and what is beyond the target.
- Talk to each other during the hunt

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RECORD NUMBER OF GYPSY MOTHS CAUGHT IN IOWA

DES MOINES - A record numbers of 624 male gypsy moths were caught in Iowa traps in 2008, easily surpassing the 175 male gypsy moths caught in 2007. The previous Iowa record of 371 was set in 1998.

Gypsy moth is one of the most notorious defoliating pests of the eastern hardwoods. The larvae of this insect will feed on the leaves of more than 300 tree species during the summer, removing the trees ability to photosynthesize new "food." Repeated defoliation that occurs several years in a row can lead to the decline and potential death of the tree.

This has been a record catch year in neighboring states as well. Minnesota trapped three times the number of gypsy moths as its previous record. Wisconsin is reporting higher numbers of trapped male moths in counties just across the Mississippi River from Iowa's Allamakee and Clayton counties.

Gypsy moth has established itself in eastern Wisconsin, and is beginning to move towards northeast Iowa. Through Iowa's statewide trapping program and follow up treatments, gypsy moth has been kept from becoming established in Iowa. However, there are now five counties (Allamakee, Clayton, Dubuque, Jackson and Clinton) within 60 miles of the current gypsy moth establishment boundary line.

Gypsy moth is a European insect introduced into New England more than 100 years ago. Originally, gypsy moth larvae were brought to the United States to help provide silk for the textile industry since the native silk spinning caterpillars were susceptible to diseases. Overtime, this exotic insect escaped and continues to spread west from the original introduction site in Medford, Mass.

The Iowa Department of Agriculture, USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service's - Plant Protection and Quarantine program and the Iowa Department of Natural Resources Forestry Bureau, will be discussing the 2009 trapping season and will be working with the Gypsy Moth Slow the Spread Foundation to determine future management options. It is important to note, that gypsy moth is not considered to be established in the state of Iowa.

Visit www.iowadnr.gov and select the Forestry tab for more information on Gypsy Moths, future updates on Gypsy Moth, and other forest related pests.

For more information, contact Tivon Feeley, Iowa DNR Forest Health Program Leader, at 515-281-4915.

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MEETING SET TO DISCUSS PROPOSED BIRD CONSERVATION AREA

CHARITON – The Iowa Department of Natural Resources will host a public discussion on the proposed designation of the Stephens State Forest region as a state Bird Conservation Area (BCA). The meeting is at 7 p.m., Oct. 30, at the Lucas County Conservation Education Center at Pin Oak Marsh, located about 1 mile south of Chariton on the east side of Hwy. 14

Creating Bird Conservation Areas is a high priority for the Iowa DNR. “The proposed Stephens Forest BCA is a unique area containing both forest and grassland habitats that provides homes to about half of Iowa’s nesting bird species, many of which are considered to be of greatest conservation need,” said Bruce Ehresman, with the DNR’s Wildlife Diversity Program. “From birds of large forests, including red-shouldered hawk and ruffed grouse, to declining grassland birds like bobolink and grasshopper sparrow, Stephens Forest and its adjoining grasslands provide a perfect setting for what could be Iowa’s thirteenth Bird Conservation Area.”

The BCA concept focuses on all-bird conservation at a broad landscape scale, and the program’s success depends upon partnerships between public agencies, private conservation organizations and private landowners. Each BCA consists of at least 10,000 acres with one or more core areas of permanently protected bird habitat surrounded by large areas of privately owned land that also is good bird habitat. Core public lands are managed for all wild birds, but especially for those species experiencing regional or continental population declines.

Wildlife biologists and private lands specialists work with willing landowners to find ways to improve their properties for birds. The program is entirely voluntary, non-regulatory, and could result in extra incentives for landowners to make bird habitat improvements.

“Establishing a Bird Conservation Area helps draw attention to the needs of birds that are in trouble; plus it allows the local community and concerned citizens an opportunity to take action to help these birds,” said Doug Harr, coordinator of the Wildlife Diversity Program. “Declining species such as wood thrush, Kentucky warbler,

whip-poor-will, and American woodcock all should benefit from the designation of the Stephens Forest Bird Conservation Area.”

Besides benefiting declining bird populations, establishing BCAs in Iowa should also provide an economic boost for the state. Bird watching is one of the fastest growing pastimes in North America, with an estimated 71 million wildlife watchers in the United States. According to a recent U.S Fish and Wildlife Survey, wildlife watchers in Iowa, alone, now spend up to \$304 million each year in pursuit of this very rewarding hobby.

For more information, contact Ehresman at 515-432-2823 or Harr at 515-281-4815.

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MACBRIDE LAKE DRAWDOWN

SOLON, Iowa - A partial drawdown of Lake Macbride begins this week to accommodate shoreline repairs on Cottage Reserve Road. The repair work is contracted through the Johnson County Secondary Roads Department.

The six to eight foot drawdown will begin October 16 and continue for about two weeks on the 940-acre lake, west of Solon. Boat owners with their boats still on the lake are advised to take them off the water as soon as possible. Late season boat users are reminded that—in addition to the change in depth, some boat ramps will be inaccessible.

By comparison, the lake was dropped 15 to 20 feet over 2001 and 2002, when the Department of Natural Resources carried out major shoreline renovation.

With this latest drawdown, the DNR will repair some fishing jetties, islands and shorelines damaged by 2008 floodwaters.

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